cated readers, and advanced graduate students will be able to follow a well-crafted work of synthesis, although not one that intends to present an innovative overarching interpretation. Still, there are points that I found particularly stimulating. The examination of African slavery and the assessment of the role of the African middle classes in postindependence Africa made me reformulate some questions and will force me to revisit some of the literature in these areas.

Given its characteristics, this book will be a valuable tool for teachers and graduate students. Certain chapters can also be useful for course reading in introductory courses, although these need to be carefully chosen. Finally, historians of Africa will also benefit from reading this text. Like any good work of synthesis it will encourage reconceptualization and reassessment and thus will contribute to the exploration of old and new questions.

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V. L. Allen. *The History of Black Mineworkers in South Africa.* London: Merlin Press, 2005. Bibliograpy. Index. Volume 1***: Mining in South Africa and the Genesis of Apartheid, 1871–1948.*** xx + 491 pp. £40.00. Cloth. Volume 2: ***Apartheid, Repression and Dissent in the Mines, 1948–1982***. xx + 489 pp. £40.00 Cloth. Volume 3: ***Organize or Die.*** xxxiii + 746 pp. £50.00. Cloth.

This three-volume work has a rather unconventional history. Originally commissioned by the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) as their official history, it has expanded into the current massive opus. A work of intensely committed scholarship, written for the union, it must now subject itself to academic critique. It has never been subject to peer review. That is unfortunate, because it would have benefited from scholarly criticism and editorial pruning. Vic Allen devoted more than fifteen years of his life to the writing of it. Much of that time seems to have been spent at the headquarters of the Union in Johannesburg. Thus in the third volume, where Allen chronicles the history of the NUM itself, he relies heavily on personal experience. That volume clearly sets the mark against which future accounts of the emergence of the NUM between 1982 and 1994 will have to be measured. It is an institutional history written from the perspective of the union head office. Allen is frank about tensions that arose in the course of that history, including episodes of violent conflict initiated by union members (and occasionally officials) as well as mine managers at many different levels. This is by no means a whitewash job.

The first two volumes are quite derivative. Volume 1 relies heavily on secondary literature in the history of mining. Volume 2 is a patchwork compilation of geological information, union histories, management histories, and commission reports, as well as scholarly work on migration and the

South African state during the apartheid period. Throughout the second and third volumes, Allen pays particularly close attention to mine accidents, devoting entire chapters to the Coalbrook, Hlobane, and Kinross disasters as exemplars of state and management collusion in covering up unsafe practices. His analysis is a harrowing window into racially flawed stope–face relations and inept supervisory decisions in South African mines.

The very particularity of Allen's account of mine accidents points up historical weaknesses in the balance of these first volumes, however. His stress on broad structural determinations and his narrow institutional understanding of worker resistance as hypostatized in trade unions makes it problematic for him to get at "the reality of mineworkers' lives," which is his avowed intent. While recognizing that workers initially migrated to the mines for their own reasons, Allen's narrative, which hinges on structural "traps" (the poverty trap, the legal trap, and the land trap), leaves little space for worker agency until the African Mine Workers Union (AMWU) appears on the scene in the 1940s. Day-to-day struggles on the compounds and in the mines are reduced to "the monotonous uniformity" of miners' lives "over the last 90 years."

Allen and his assistant, Kate Carey, interviewed a sample of one hundred and twenty black miners, but his book makes very little use of those interviews, presumably because "the stories which they told about their lives had a monotonously similar tone about them." Allen's dependence on secondary sources and his use of a questionnaire means that the significance of the life histories of his informants was lost on him; to ask the right questions, one needs to know specificities of events. Allen notes that historical specifics were denied him because he was not able to get access to the Chamber of Mines archives; perhaps so, but he provides no evidence that he ever sought access to the state archives. He cites government report after government report, for instance, but seems unaware that the national archives contain transcripts of evidence presented to most state commissions. Moreover, the files of the "Native Affairs" department in its various incarnations, and of the Justice (including Police), Mines and Works, and Labour departments, all contain evidence of black miners' lives (even some black voices, mediated though they certainly are by official interpretation)—documentation that enables one to make sense of oral evidence, lifting mineworker interlocutors out of the "sameness which characterized their lives." I shall never forget, for example, the mounting excitement with which I heard Jackson Yaca in Lusikisiki in 1984 describe a 1938 faction fight on Crown Mines for which I had a police report from the Native Affairs archives.

Allen must have been aware of such evidence. He cites my work and that of Phil Bonner, which makes frequent allusion to it. Interestingly enough, he makes extensive use of my unpublished account of the 1946 strike (which I did not even know was in circulation) but chooses to ignore

my interpretation of the origins and nature of that event, which was available as a published article. The point is not that he ignored the article but that he failed to engage with my argument, which has to do with the informal nature of most worker organization during the 1946 strike—and for ten years before the strike. Indeed, I would insist that it is impossible to understand the rise of the AMWU merely by looking at its leadership—or even its core membership. One must also examine the tenacious solidarity and indomitable integrity of generations of ordinary miners who forged their everyday lives collectively between the various "traps" which were undoubtedly slowly closing around them. If one insists, as Allen seems to, that organized worker resistance can be expressed only through a union, one ends up unable adequately to explain the 1920 strike and is left to scramble around for every little tidbit one can find to exaggerate the importance of the AMWU in 1946.

The second volume deals with the "interregnum" between 1948 and 1982. There were no unions on the mines during this period, so Allen takes a detour into more general South African history, dealing especially with the rise of independent unions and the Soweto student uprising, to move his reader from the 1946 strike on the mines to the establishment of the NUM in 1982. The discussion commences with extraneous material (some of it very interesting) on South African mining and treatment of migrants per se, before turning to the 1950s and 1960s, which were decades of "a grotesquely unequal balance of forces" in the compounds. Allen claims that "in practice, most mineworkers were as effectively incarcerated as if they had been in prison." However, retired mineworkers to whom I spoke in the countryside in the 1980s certainly did not remember their experience that way. They told of traveling on weekends to visit friends in compounds spread across the Rand. There was hardly an old man in the country to whom I spoke, moreover, who could not testify to the effectiveness of compound demonstrations—not so much against management at work, to be sure, as against indunas in the compounds. The compound managers I interviewed were constantly aware that the compounds were "inherently unstable patterns of fragile alliances." This was not a new discovery in the 1970s. In the "dark dungeon" of the 1960s, labor mobility in a booming economy was at least as important as repression in keeping the mines (and indeed black workers more generally) relatively quiescent. South African–based workers moved freely between mines and from mining to secondary industry. The mines became increasingly dependent on foreign migrants for whom the compounds were not only "prisons" but also ethnic havens, and (especially for workers from Lesotho) training grounds for developing mining skills put to good use in the 1970s as Malawians departed and more militant but unskilled South African-based labor returned. Before that happened, after 1971, however, there was a wage explosion on the mines. Allen's explanation of this was, for me, the most interesting chapter in the volume. I know of no better analysis of the wage phenomenon.

As noted at the outset, the third volume, dealing largely with the history of the NUM, is truly original, based as it is on Allen's interviews with union leaders and his own participation in events at the union head office. Allen's narrative will be indispensable for future accounts of the rise of the NUM. Although his treatment of management anti-union strategies lacks nuance, he is remarkably frank in dealing with the innumerable teething problems experienced by a young and rapidly growing union. He is admirably open about the difficulties of gathering evidence from incomplete union records and about his necessary reliance on often contradictory oral testimony. He does not say if his informants insisted on anonymity, but his failure to cite his sources is one of the most irritating aspects of this volume. Since I have spoken to some of the same people, I can occasionally identify the origin of his stories, but I find myself constantly frustrated by unattributed accounts which do not jibe with what I have been told. If he had identified his sources (or at least their social positions), one could more easily factor in their biases—and of those of one's own informants, of course. Moreover, he apparently made no effort to obtain access to documents from the union's legal advisers, whose archives are replete with notes and minutes from local mines, especially dealing with the 1987 strike.

In fact, although it is my impression that Allen had his fingers on the pulse of events at NUM head office, I am much less sure about his understanding of happenings in outlying regions or on the mines themselves. In regard to Vaal Reefs gold mine, which I know best, for example, he never seems to comprehend the basic structure of the mine at the time: nine shafts, three divisional mine managers with distinctly different labor policies at different times, and a regional general manager. Often he refers to shafts as though there were no divisions. He is confused about the date of the Bregman report on the 1986 violence at Vaal Reefs (which appeared only after the 1987 strike). At one point he refers to No. 10 shaft, which did not operate until after his period. Sometimes, especially in dealing with the 1985 mass dismissals, he refers to South division as though it is the entire mine. Lira Setona, the union leader in South division, was dismissed with his fellows in April 1985 and was assassinated in Lesotho. Allen has him active on the mine throughout 1985.

In terms of Allen's total story, these are relatively minor matters, pointing perhaps to vagaries of oral testimony, but they give rise to doubt about the accuracy of his account of events in the Orange Free State, at Western Deep Levels, and on the coal mines, the other regions where the NUM was most active. Once again, as in his account of the AMWU, Allen's focus on the union's central leadership tends to hypostasize formal organization, distorting the complexities of informal organization and events at the grass roots.

Whatever its flaws, this third volume is nonetheless absolutely essential reading for anyone seeking to understand the rise of the NUM. Later work will no doubt correct errors and inconsistencies of fact and interpretation, but it is unlikely that any other book will ever provide so complete an

account, warts and all, of the tumultuous first twelve years in the life of South Africa's largest trade union.

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Kasahun Woldemariam. *Myths and Realities in the Distribution of Socioeconomic Resources and Political Power in Ethiopia.* New York: University Press of America, 2006. 304 pp. Figures. Tables. Illustrations. Appendix. Glossary. Bibliography. Index. $39.95. Paper.

The field of Ethiopian studies is a stuffy attic desperately in need of fresh air. Original interpretations based on factual evidence are hard to come by; this book does not make progress in that direction, not because of a lack of intent, but because the evidence brought to bear simply does not prove the author's argument. Kasahun Woldemariam argues that the Amhara were not a privileged ethnic group in Ethiopian history and that the current regime has accepted this idea of historical privilege and set about trying to right historic wrongs with catastrophic effects. In doing so the author has set a high bar for gathering historical evidence that would prove the point, and disproving the work of many other scholars of Ethiopian history.

That goal is stated in the introduction, after which the book digresses into a discussion of democratic institutions and development policies. Only in chapters 5 and 6 does the author begin to tackle the issue of disproving Amhara domination. But the statistics he uses do not provide sufficient evidence. For example, examining the percentages of students enrolled in various kinds of schools during the Haile Selassie era, he finds that a higher percentage of students in the south were enrolled in private schools than elsewhere; he concludes that since private schools were better than government schools, people in the south were better off. Apart from the fact that this seems to prove the fact that the government invested more in the north (the Amhara area), the reader is not given the percentage of schoolage children enrolled in school in each province. This is just one example of the unconvincing use of evidence to support the author's argument. Moreover, as the author never details which ethnic groups live in which provinces, readers without prior understanding of the political and ethnic geographies of Ethiopia will be hopelessly lost.

Other points also ring false to those familiar with Ethiopian history. Arguing that the term "Amhara" was used to denote someone as a Christian, Woldemariam then describes the use of the term "Amhara" to denote an ethnic group as the work of "contemporary political entrepreneurs." It would be more accurate to say that the change occurred around 1900 or even earlier. While group boundaries were fluid because of intermarriage and assimilation, the implication that this group was formed only recently,